RAIN-MAKING

Little information is available on the processes of rain-making among the Luo. Hanson states that it is an important ceremony and is performed by a mango priests who lives among the people for this purpose.(1) According to Northcote, the rain-maker is greatly esteemed, and his homestead is usually found near a big tree which is considered sacred. When rain is wanted, he gathers some herbs, puts them in a large pot of water and boils them under the tree. He draws off a little into another pot and, sucking it up through a reed, squirts it into the air, after first blowing through the reed and making the pot bubble.(2) Evans-Pritchard mentions that the Luo rain-maker is called the *mon kech* and that sometimes his functions are combined with those of the *jobilo*. Rain-makers among the neighbouring Bantu seem to have a higher reputation than Luo *jokech* and are often consulted.

WITCHCRAFT

Sickness is thought to be due either to the malevolence of a ghost or, more frequently, to magic worked by some envious person who wishes to bring misfortune on his victim.(3) In either case the aid of a witchdoctor is sought and he, by means of various incantations, discovers the cause and the culprit. A sorcerer may cause death by spearing the shadow of his victim, by working spells, by hiding certain objects near the house which bring sickness to the inmates. If a ghost is causing trouble the witchdoctor prescribes offerings and sacrifices necessary for appeasement. He also discovers thieves, conducts ordeals and divines the causes of events. He makes counter-magic to defend people against the activities of sorcerers and is the general prescriber of all cures. Johnston mentions a 'deeper magic' (*mbirigo*) which, among the Ganz tribe is practised by the blacksmiths.(4)

## LIFE CYCLE

BIRTH

After the birth of a boy the mother stays inside the house for four days; for a girl, she stays inside for three days. The father of the child does not eat or sleep in the hut until the child begins to cut its teeth.

Twins are considered lucky; their arrival is attended by many ceremonies and by propitiatory dances.

PUBERTY

Until marriage, girls help their mothers in the fields and assist them in cooking and carrying. Boys help in herding the animals. At puberty both boys and girls have their front lower teeth extracted and for four days they remain in their homes. After this period they go about visiting

(1) Hanson, *The Northern Bantu*, 1915, p.292.
(2) Northcote, *J.A.I.*, 1907, p.60. (3) *Ibid.*
(4) *The Uganda Protectorate*, Vol.II, 1902.

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304 friends and receiving presents of fowls. Girls, in addition, have their bodies scarified on the sides and back. From this time on until marriage the boys live in the bachelors' hut and the girls in the unmarried women's quarters. There is no mention by any of the authorities of an age-set system.

DEATH

764 The dead are buried close to their homes, a man on his right side with the hand under the head and a woman on her left side, also with the hand under the head.[1]

765 Friends and relatives gather shortly after death and, if the deceased was a man of importance, the whole of his clan is represented. Every man brings his companion bull and rides it. All dress up as if for war and the bare party takes place. If the dead man was not very important the mourning is limited to shaving the head and painting the body with white clay. Offerings are put on the grave of the deceased.

4: Hobley G-5 (ca. 1900) 1902 FL11 Luo FL11



766 worn is black. Others smear themselves with white earth. Relations in the village shave their heads three days after a death. The eldest son of the deceased sits on a stool in the road outside the village and his head is shaved by an old woman. For three days after the death of anyone of importance the villagers do not cultivate.

766 [124] If a big chief dies all the surrounding people collect at the village; even if a neighbouring clan is at war hostilities are suspended, and they attend the funeral rites of their late enemy. In the case of the death of a chief a new hut is built and the deceased is buried inside in a sitting posture; the grave is dug by a brother of the deceased. A new ox hide is placed at the bottom of the grave, and the head of the corpse is covered with a water pot. Seeds of every kind of grain grown are put into the grave; sweet potatoes are excluded. The people dance and drink *tembe* for ten days and many oxen are slaughtered. The men wail for ten days, but the women wail every morning for about a year. No one cultivates the fields for ten days.

844 846 *Birth customs.*—On the occasion of a birth, if it is a boy it is kept inside the house for four days, if it is a girl for three days. When a birth takes place the female neighbours attend, and a goat is killed for the mother and the other women. No man is allowed in the hut until three or four days have elapsed. The father of the child does not eat or sleep again in the hut until the child begins to cut its teeth. The mother does not go to cultivate for about nine days after the birth.

844 609 [304] [53] If a woman has had two children and they have both died, she will upon the birth of the third child take it out of the village on a basket-work tray and place it in the road; an old woman who has had a hint of this will go and pick it up and take it to her house; then the father of the child goes and buys it back for a goat; having recovered it the father bores the lobe of its right ear and inserts a small earring of brass wire. If the child is a boy it is henceforward called Owiti and if a girl it is called Awiti, meaning the child that has been thrown away. The old woman who picked up the child is afterwards called mother in addition to the real mother.

845 Twins are considered lucky, but the infants and their parents have to stay in seclusion in their hut for a whole month. Women neighbours may enter the hut but men may not. The twin born first is called Apio (the one who comes quickly). The twin born second is called Adongo (the one who is delayed). The birth of twins is signalled by dances which extend over a whole month; they are apparently of a somewhat obscene character.

582 583 *Marriage customs.*—Girls are espoused at the age of seven, and they often go to their husband's house at the age of ten or eleven. The suitor commences by making small payments to the father of the girl every month or two. When the man has paid say one cow and twenty sheep he takes the girl to his home.

585 The unmarried girls of the village take the bride to her husband's house. The father of the girl kills an ox and takes the meat and a quantity of native produce to the man's village by way of providing a wedding feast. If the man's

4: Hobley G-5 (ca. 1900) 1902 FL11 Luo FL11



*Personal marks, etc.*—They draw the six middle incisors in the lower jaw. If a man does not have these teeth drawn it is said that his wife will die soon after marriage. The women tattoo a pattern on the chest and stomach, consisting of thin curved lines of dots on each side reaching round to near the spine, where they turn upwards. Males are not tattooed. The tattooing is done simply for ornament.

*Circumcision.*—They do not circumcise. If a man has killed an enemy in war he shaves his head three days after his return from fighting. He moreover does not enter his village until a live fowl has been hung round his neck, the fowl is then decapitated and the head of the fowl left hanging from the man's neck. Shortly after his return a feast is made to the man who has been killed, in order that his spirit shall not come and trouble the victor.

*Dress, etc.*—Unmarried men go naked. (Plate V). Married men who have a child wear a small piece of goat skin; this piece of goat skin is a most important matter for a married man, for although practically useless as a covering he must on no account call to see his mother-in-law without this dress or she will be desperately hurt and insist on his paying up a goat. Even if he is properly clothed in European garments he must wear his goat skin underneath. Unmarried girls wear no clothes (Plate VI). Married women wear a tail of strings behind but not in front, like the Northern Kavirondo. Married women when they go to visit another village wear a goat skin slung from the shoulder, upon which curious patterns are cut. When a married woman first shows the tail, her husband presents her with a goat, which she sends to her father. It is very bad manners in a married woman to serve up food to her husband without wearing her tail, and the husband will probably refuse to eat the food. This rule even holds if the woman should be wearing garments of cloth. If a man touches a woman's tail it is said that he wishes to bewitch her, even the husband must not touch it; if this rule is broken it is necessary to kill a goat.

Many of the Jo-Luo affect rather a notable ornamentation of the ear; about fifteen small holes are pierced along the outer edge of the ear and in each hole a ring of brass is inserted, and on the front side the brass is flattened out like a small leaf, to the outside extremity of each ring is attached a blue bead. In the lowest hole in the lobe of the ear a plain brass ring is inserted.

For a long time I thought that these blue beads were ordinary trade beads of the variety known as *kiboti*, but upon inquiry this was indignantly repudiated, and it was explained that these beads were picked up in the fields in the neighbourhood of the Mau-gulfs Hills after a heavy thunderstorm, and that it was believed that they descended with the rain. Some of the chiefs also wear beads of jasper and chalcedony with a fine circular hole; these beads were formerly of great value and were purchased at the rate of one cow per bead; they were picked up in the same way. Their name for these beads is Nya-Lao, and it is thought by some authorities that these beads have wandered down in ages past from the direction of Egypt; in fact some of the more Northern Nilotic people tell you that they

5: Hobley G-5 (ca. 1900) 1903 FL11 Luo FL11
Nandi FL13
Bantu Kavirondo FL4



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563

of the baby, if a boy, and round its left wrist, if a girl. Next morning, the body and head of the quail are cut off, leaving the lower half of the beak of the bird suspended by the string round the child's neck; everyone then knows that it has been named.

Names are often suggested by some event happening at the time.

Mumia was born on the day of an attack by the Wanga or Elgoni people, and was thus named Mumia. Formerly, again, when Europeans were great curios in the country, if a child was born on the day a caravan camped at the village, it would often be named after the leader of it, if his character to be well known, thus "Jakinia," "Martinia," and "Chilos"[1] are very common.

### Tattooing and Tribal Marks.

These rarely appear to have any special significance, but, among the *Ja-Luo* people, it is thought that a woman will not bear children unless she is tattooed.

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All Kisumu girls are tattooed just below the navel (Fig. 6). When, however, a woman first becomes pregnant, more elaborate tattooings are added in front as far up as the breasts, and a belt of markings is carried right round the waist. All the men are not marked, it is quite a matter of choice with them. For instance, the head chief of the Kisumu people is not tattooed.

Fig. 6.

The various tribes of the *Ja-Luo* have slightly differing tattoo marks.

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Among the Kotuh, if a warrior kills an enemy in warfare, on his return he has two rows of round marks tattooed on his right chest and continued upwards over his right shoulder; moreover, upon reaching home, it is considered essential that he should have connection with his wife as soon as convenient; this is believed to prevent the spirit of his dead enemy from haunting and bewitching him.

The Turkana and Suk tattoo rows of spots from the chest over the shoulder, but whether this is significant of the warrior having killed an enemy or not, is not known.

An examination of the Kotuh language affords reasons for believing that there is a strain of Kavirondo or Turkana blood among them, and this peculiar tattooing custom may be additional evidence of the affinity.

The Kotuh women have a number of raised dots tattooed on their stomachs and abdomen arranged regularly in close lozenge fashion. An ointment is rubbed into the scars to produce weals.

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### Numerical Proportion of Sexes.

In a previous publication[2] I ventured the opinion that the female sex greatly outnumbered the male. My observation was based upon the prevalence of

[1] The native version of the names Jackson, Martin and Hobley.
[2] *Loc. cit.*, p. 19

5: Hobley G-5 (ca. 1900) 1903 FL11 Lua FL11
Bantu Kavirondo FL4



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Jalow Girl; Kajulo Tribe.

Luoleva Woman and Young Girl.

Kavirondo Woman (N. Bantu).

Kisumu Girls.

10: Roscoe M-5 (ca. 1900)1915
FL11 Luo FL11



When a man marries

a second or third wife, he may select another place for his new wife, either in the village near his former wife, or he may elect to take her to some other village. A man who has wives dwelling in different places lives with them in turn. Married women are careful in regard to their relations with men. Should a woman be lax in her behaviour or encourage men to visit her, her husband will send her back to her parents and divorce her.

A wife who is proved to be sterile is not divorced, but her parents send her sister to become the man's wife, and he is expected to pay another sum as a marriage-fee for her; but there is no stated time when the sum shall be paid after the woman goes to live with him. The former wife continues to live with him as his wife.

**Distinctive dress of married women.** Each woman after marriage makes a girdle with a long fringe at the back and ties the ends together, which gives it the appearance of a tail. The girdle is worn constantly during the husband's life-time, but, should he die, she takes it off and puts it on the house-roof over the door during the season of mourning to show that she is a widow and is mourning. After marriage a wife scarifies her sides and back in addition to the scarifications she made at puberty. When a woman has a son born, she makes a clay-mound in the middle of the floor in her house for the food pot to rest on when the family are at meals.

**Birth customs.** A wife who expects her confinement calls in an elderly woman to act as midwife. This woman is a person who has had experience in such matters and is herself a mother. When the child is born, the midwife cuts the umbilical cord on an axe handle if the child is a boy, and on a hoe handle if it is a girl. The placenta of a boy is buried outside on the right side of the doorway and that of a girl on the left side. During the first three days the father remains near the house in which his wife and child lie, but the midwife alone enters and attends to the wants of the mother and child. On the third day the father takes a fowl and rubs it on the child's chest and turns it loose, when it becomes the property of the child. When the new moon appears, the parents bathe, and

10: Roscoe M-S (ca. 1900)1915
FL11 Luo FL11



shave their heads, taking care to keep separate the hair which §46
is cut off. This hair is hidden away in some place near, by preference in a rat-hole or in some hole where it is not likely to be found again.

**Birth of twins.** At the birth of twins the parents remain §45
together in one house for ten days, and the midwife waits on them. When this time of seclusion ends, a small pot of blood is drawn from the neck of an ox, cooked and given to the parents to eat. After the meal they are escorted to the river, washed, and their heads shaved. Their house is then swept and the floor smeared with cow-dung, and friends come and dance in the village and drink beer. The mother takes the twins a round of visits which lasts several days, but she returns home each night to sleep. At each house she visits the people give [421]
her presents of grain. When the visits have been made the mother brews beer with the grain she has received in presents, and her friends again gather to dance and to drink the beer.

**Initiation ceremonies.** Children live in the same village §57
with their parents and under their control. Until marriage they lead a free and happy life, with few wants and cares. The boys assist in herding cattle, and the girls help their mothers in their fields and also carry wood and water and assist in cooking. Their duties are light and there is no force beyond [302]
argument used to make them work. Children imitate their elders in seeking ornaments to wear and in smearing their bodies with oil and red or white paint. When they come §81
to the age of puberty, their four front teeth in the lower §84
jaw are extracted and they are initiated in the customs of the clan. For four days they remain in the house, after which [93]
they go about visiting their friends and receive presents of fowls. Girls go through the same ceremony as boys in having their teeth extracted, but, in addition, their bodies are scarified on the sides and back. Should there be excessive haemorrhage [752]
when teeth are extracted, the parents send to the man who has the bracelets of the deceased person after whom the boy is named and borrow them, and the youth wears them until the bleeding ceases. When the ceremony of extracting the §62
teeth is over, the boys are sent to live in the boys' quarters

11:Hartmann M-5 (ca. 1920) 1928 FL11 Luo FL11



# Some Customs of the Luwo (or Nilotic Kavirondo) living in South Kavirondo.

By the Rev. H. Hartmann.

Contents:

Birth. — Betrothal and Marriage. — Burial of a married Man. — Burial of a Woman. — Burial of a Child.

## Birth.

The Luwo people live together with their families in kraals. These families consist of the owner of the village with his wives, and his sons with their respective wives and children, and the owner's unmarried daughters.

Each wife has her own hut. The husband spends most of his time in the hut of his favourite wife. He may, however, have besides a hut for each of his wives, a small hut for himself, but he will never sleep in it. For this purpose he goes to the huts of each of his wives in turn, or generally he sleeps in that of his favourite wife, and visits the others, whenever he is informed by the women that one of them has menstruated, then after 2 days he goes to her hut for a couple of nights.

If a woman has conceived and happens to be one who has not brought forth yet, then 3 or 4 months after conception she gets little incisions *(kulo)* made all round the waist. For this operation the patient has to sit down on a stone (nothing else). The operation is performed by an older woman. She uses a crooked thorn which is hooked under the skin, and where the point of the thorn lifts the skin a very tiny cut is made with a native razor. Between every cut there is a space of about ¼ of an inch. Three rows of incisions are made this way all round the waist just below the navel, the rows being also about ¼ of an inch apart. No medicine is applied.

When the skin is healed again the woman goes home for 3 days to show herself *(tero kulo)* and a goat is killed for her by her father. She returns with roasted outside flour for brewing beer and a sheep. When the beer is ready the sheep and some chickens are killed and they have a feast *(keng kulo kulo)*.

After the feast the young woman gets from an older one some medicine, the mixture of burnt herbs, of which she has to take a little morning and night for one month *(nyiyo mimbi)*.

When this month is over she gets another medicine, prepared out of cooked roots of plants *(yath ogolo)* which she takes morning and night until one month before giving birth.

In case a woman who is with child has committed adultery she takes a certain medicine, called *manyoni*, otherwise she will have a miscarriage or the child will be a weakling.

When the hour of childbirth has come the woman sits down on the floor of the hut naked. Even the usual string of beads is taken from her waist. A

14: Johnston G-4, 5 (no date) 1904 FL11 Luo FL11



this tail behind and receives a present from her husband. Afterwards it is considered very bad manners for a married woman to serve food to her husband without putting on this tail. On the other hand, if the husband or any other man should touch the married woman's tail, it is considered that he wishes to bewitch her, and such an offence must be atoned for by the usual sacrifice of a goat.

ORNAMENTED CHARACTERISTIC SCARRING ON MAN'S BREAST (1/4 SIZE)

The Ja-luo pull out the incisors in the lower jaw. It may also occur amongst these people, as amongst the Lango tribes to the north, that not only the four incisors, but even the canines, are taken out, at any rate from the mouths of boys. They do not circumcise, nor do they scar or tattoo their bodies, with the exception that women raise three parallel lines of dots in a semi-circle on either side of the body, the ends of the semi-circle meeting in front just below the navel, and again on the backbone. If a man has killed an enemy in war, he propitiates his enemy's spirit by shaving his head for three days after his return. Heads of men are also shaved in the patterns given in the accompanying illustration (Fig. 430).

The Ja-luo, together with tribes remotely allied in origin, such as the Nik and Lango, ornament the outer rim of the ear in a remarkable manner. About fifteen small holes are pierced along the edge of the cartilage, and a flattened ring of brass (looking in shape rather like a melon seed) is inserted. Hanging on the outer side of the brass ring is a large blue glass bead. In the lowest hole towards the lobe a plain brass ring is inserted. Regarding these blue beads Mr. Hobley writes: "For a long time I thought these blue beads were ordinary trade beads of the variety known as 'kiboti'; but upon inquiry I found this idea was indignantly repudiated. It was explained to me that the beads were picked up in the fields in the neighbourhood of the Mavoglio Hills* after a heavy thunderstorm, and it was believed that they descended with the rain." Some of the chiefs also wear bits of jasper and chalcedony with a fine circular hole. These beads were formerly of great value, and were purchased at the rate of one cow per bead. They are said to have been picked up in the same way. Their name for these beads is

* In North Kavirondo.

14: Johnston G-4.5 (no date) 1904 3'L.11 Lee 3'L.11

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14. Johnston G.-4, 5 (no date) 1904 FL11 Luo FL11



but until the child begins to cut its teeth. The mother does not go out to cultivate for nine days after the birth. If a woman has had two children previously who have died, she follows the same ceremony as that described among the Bantu Kavirondo. When the child has been brought back by an old woman, it is welcomed by the father, who then hews the hide of the right ear and inserts an earring of brass wire. The child is likewise welcomed "Owiti," if a boy; if a girl, "Awiti," meaning "the child that has been thrown away." The old woman who picks up the child is regarded as its foster-mother. Twins are considered lucky, though their arrival is attended by a good many ceremonies and by preliminary dances which are of an obscene nature.

[illegible] A woman and nine children, some [illegible] of [illegible]

When a person dies, the corpse is immediately taken out of the house. If it be a woman, her brothers-in-law dig the grave in the verandah of the house. The corpse is buried on its left side with the hand under the head. In the case of a woman's death, her relatives and friends come and wail. Her husband presents each clan that attends with a goat. The mourners stay for three days. The hut in which a person has died is used for a month. The neighbours then meet together and drink beer, and the house is broken down. Upon the death of a man his brother digs his grave, and he is buried in the house of his first wife, if she is still living. If she is dead, he is buried in the verandah of his own house. Men only wail for one day. After that only the women wail, at first for three days, and then at dawn for fifteen days.

As a sign of mourning the women wear a string of brass fibre round the forehead. They also wear a black tail fringed with white strings for about a month. Others smear themselves with white earth. Relatives of

20:Ominde I-5 (ca. 1948) 1952
FL11 Luo FL11



the mother. Thus the adolescent girl enjoys the freedom of being able to do most of her domestic work independently. Unless strict discipline is exercised she spends much of her time meeting her male friends. The thought of marriage begins to assume a reality and to become an influential factor in her attitude and movements. The self-love which made its first conspicuous appearance during the preceding age now takes the form of an effort to make herself look more attractive. Holes may be made in the ears from which to suspend ear-rings, and all sorts of armlets or bands are worn round the wrists. Clothes or head-dresses of bright colours are specially chosen. Although the practice is fast dying out, girls of this age used also to be addicted to tattooing their backs. Better clothing is among the most pressing needs of adolescent girls, and their families must either make sacrifices or else persuade the girl to make do with what is available.

*The attitude of the parents.* The attitude of parents towards an adolescent girl is greatly concerned with her economic value and her ability to do domestic work efficiently. An added consideration is the girl's conduct, both in and outside the family circle.

Hence, a girl's ability to work well in the house gives her mother a satisfaction which finds an outlet in conversation with other women. The mother strives to put forward the merits of her daughter as well as her social conduct in the community, while the young girl becomes almost mistress of the house, her mother hardly touching the work—especially when there is more than one adolescent daughter. The shock experienced when the girl is married is a matter which some of the envious neighbours do not refrain from mentioning.

On the other hand, a daughter who is inefficient in domestic work is no credit to her mother's reputation.